High level Committee to study the proposal on Iran-India Gas pipeline

2095. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that his Ministry has set up a high-level Committee to examine a proposal received from the Government of Iran-regarding Iran-India natural gas pipeline proposal;

(b) if so, the composition of the Committee together with its detailed terms of reference; and

(c) whether the proposed pipeline is to pass through Pakistan and whether this factor has been/would be considered carefully before giving the proposal green signal and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (c) Yes Sir. An Indo-Iran Joint Committee has been constituted to examine all^aspects relating to supply of Iranian gas to India. These would include different modes of transportation, route options and related political, security, economic and technical issues. The Indian team to the first meeting of this Joint Committee scheduled to be held later his month will be led by Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs. The other members of the Indian delegations will be officers from the Ministries of External Affairs, Petroleum and Natural Gas and Defence.

Devolution package offered by Sri Lankan Government

2096. SHRI V.P. DURAISAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that devolution package being offered by the Sri Lankan Government ignores. Tamils of Indian origin but not other minorities like the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Muslims, if so, the details thereof; and

(b) what steps the Ministry would take to convince Lankan Government to include Indian origin Tamils also in the devolution package?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (b) The Government of India has consistently supported a political settlement **of the** conflict in Sri Lanka, by which all communities would be able to realise their aspirations. The details of a devolution package in Sri Lankan are for the Sri Lankan Parliament to determine, in exercise of its sovereign powers.

PaD fledged passport office at Shimla

2097. SMT. CHANDRESH KUMARI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether some proposals to open a full fledged passport office at Shimla have been received from State Government of Himachal Pradesh;

(b) if so, the details thereof with date of its pendency;

(c) whether the Union Government are aware that an independent office of foreign employment and manpower export bureau at Shimla has been set up;

(d) whether the Union Government propose to accord the proposal as in (a) for early operation of (c); and

(e) if so, the details thereof and if not, reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Since 1994 the Government of the State of Himachal Pradesh has taken up with the Ministry of External Affairs the proposal to open a full Passport Office at Shimla.

(c) Letters of introduction from the Bureau at Shimla have been received in the PRO, Chandigarh from time to time.

(d) and (e) The recommendation of the Standing Committee of Parliament has been that a passport office should be centrally located and should get an average of 50,000 applications per annum. Such objective criteria have been used to establish passport offices in the country.

The requirements of Himachal Pradesh are at present met by the Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC) which has been in